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ABSTRACT

This curriculum outline introduces the components of a creative writing course which acquaints students with various forms of Japanese poetry. First, the goals and student objectives of the course are presented, emphasizing the history and different forms of Japanese poetry such as "renga," a kind of challenge poetry which will be used to develop skills used in more contemporary writing forms; "haiku," to distill thoughts of other literary forms (prose, long poems, and plays); and "tanka." Students will be encouraged to use the poetic forms as well as meditation and "koan" (a kind of riddle) to stimulate creative thought, break writing barriers, and inspire the use of the concrete detail in writing. Next, the course outline and assignments are listed; they are followed by a description of the methods used for evaluating students, which focus on the students' production of their own works based on Japanese poetry and the use of concrete detail. A list of discussion questions is then provided. The activities and strategies for presenting material are summarized, focusing on the process of creation and examining the importance of both the "experiencer" and the creator to the creative process. The remainder of the outline lists the audiovisual aids used in the course, and explains the importance of concrete detail in any genre. Includes a list of suggested sources for teaching Japanese poetry and course material. Contains an annotated bibliography. (TGI)

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ED 407 962

ENGLISH

"OVERVIEW OF JAPANESE POETRY"

Use In: Creative Writing

BY

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OVERVIEW OF JAPANESE POETRY

FOR: ENG:110 CREATIVE WRITING

1) GOALS

** To acquaint writers with various forms of Japanese (and later Chinese) poetry

** To help writers concentrate on concrete details

** To help writers learn to "focus" for writing

2) STUDENT OBJECTIVES

** Students should learn the histories of renga, tanka and haiku.

** They should learn the forms of renga, tanka and haiku and should study and discuss the works of the Masters.

** Writers will be encouraged to use the poetic forms as well as meditation and koan (a kind of riddle used for discovery--e.g. What is the sound of one hand clapping?) to stimulate creative thought, break writing barriers and inspire the use of concrete detail in writing.

** They will write renga (challenge poems) together and haiku alone in order to practice the forms and in order to develop skills used in more "contemporary" writing forms.

** They will use haiku to distill the thoughts of other forms-- e.g. prose works, long poems and plays-- in order to achieve focus for these forms.

3) OUTLINE AND ASSIGNMENTS

A. In class, students will be given sample poems and discuss their histories, uses and forms in order to become acquainted with the "essences" of the forms.

B. Next, they will discuss the need for concrete detail in haiku as well as in all good creative writing and be encouraged to explore the meaning of their senses and their use in communicating word-pictures to others.

C. Next, the writers will be devided into groups of two and

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challenge each other to write renga (a collaborative form in which one poet writes the first three lines (of 5 stresses, 7 stresses and 7 stresses) and the other completes the thought (adding two lines of 7 stresses each). They will change roles so that each can experience both functions.

D. Then, they will be encouraged to string 3 or 4 renga sequences together into a longer version of a poem.

E. After this, they will be required to write a half dozen haiku (5,7,5 structure) and at least two tanka (same form as renga, only individually-written and complete unto themselves).

F. Finally, they will be asked to respond to various koan (word riddles) in individual ways and to use them as idea-stimulators for themselves.

THIS UNIT IS EXPECTED TO USE FROM SIX TO NINE HOURS OF CLASS TIME BUT MAY BE EXTENDED SUCCESSFULLY TO TWELVE HOURS IF DESIRED.

4) EVALUATION

First, students will be asked if they already have any direct knowledge or if they are aware of having formed "stereotypes" about Asian poetry.

After this, they will learn about the forms and produce their first poems (renga) in collaboration with each other. This will be an early unit in the class and will help class members to meet each other. It will also allow them to help each other to create and take the onus of producing off of the individual. Finally, it will allow them to challenge each other, in a non-threatening way, to achieve.

Finally, the writers will be judged by being asked to produce their own works based on the forms of haiku and tanka and to create new works in response to "starters" that will be provided for them--e.g. If those who now live at the edges of our society were moved to the middle, what would the new edges look like? If tomorrow morning you woke up and were a different sex, how would the remainder of your day go? etc.)

Ultimately, the use of concrete detail and focus that writers should have gained from this study will be evaluated throughout the entire semester).

5) DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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A. Look at the lists of haiku poems as grouped by senses. Which could fit under other senses and why?

B. Try to group the haiku of the Four Great Masters (Basho, Buson, Issa, and Shiki.) Enumerate the similarities and differences of each with regard to subject matter, philosophy, use of detail, etc.

C. Though haiku generally concerns itself with "natural" images, some of the poems seem to be concerned with man-made things. Which are they? Can you speculate on why the subjects stray from nature?

D. List the 5 senses and try to compose your own haiku for each. Be sure to use concrete imagery.

E. Write three haiku; then, pass them to a partner and let her use them to complete a renga by adding 2 seven syllable lines. Choose your best and try to add several new renga to them to produce a single, long poem composed of renga.

F. Describe the sound of one hand clapping, of a rainbow, of the music of the spheres. Touch love and smell the color brown. Eat your favorite adjective, and tell how it tastes, what texture it has, how it feels going down. Describe the parent you would've picked to have had you a choice. How does she/he look, walk, speak, dress, think, etc.? (Lots of other challenges, questions and koan are possible, too).

6) ACTIVITIES/STRTEGIES FOR PRESENTING MATERIAL

A. Activities: Hearing Japanese flute music, seeing slides and overheads of Japanese paintings and calligraphy and brush drawings, burning incense, discussing Japanese poetry from handouts, writing together and alone.

B. Strategies : To be non-threatening and dwell very little on the judgment of the "worth" of the students' ideas. To dwell, instead, on the process of creation and the shared glory of setting-up the punch-line as well as on delivering it. To discuss the function of the "experiencer" to the creative process as well as the creator.

7) A-V AIDS

See Part A in the previous category.

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8) CONNECTIONS, COMPARISONS/CONTRASTS

Students will be opening with this unit and will be struck by comparisons between these poems and everything they read and write during the semester. It is the concrete detail that is crucial to any genre that will be explored in a creative writing class. Additionally, though forms that students might explore could be less rigid, the attention to a "simple" form early-on should be used as a way to encourage the exploration of form and purpose in even the most "experimental" kind of creation.

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Three well-respected anthologies of haiku are:

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If you consult no other source, consult this. Blyth presents hundreds of haiku and, more importantly, does some interesting commentary on each. Steeped in the zen tradition and, therefore, right-on in terms of mood and perception.

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MODULE FOR ASIAN STUDIES

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challenge each other to write renga (a collaborative form in which one poet writes the first three lines (of 5 stresses, 7 stresses and 7 stresses) and the other completes the thought (adding two lines of 7 stresses each). They will change roles so that each can experience both functions.

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TANKA- An ancient Chinese/Japanese form of syllabic verse employing a syllabic structure of 5-7-5-7-7. Flourished in Japan from 8th to 14th centuries. Modern form known as waka or uta.

High on the summit
the garden is all moonlight
the moon is golden.
More precious is the contact
of your lips in the shadow.

-Jorge Luis Borges/Alastair Reid

RENGA- A kind of challenge poetry, using the tanka form but linking 2 to 100 parts in such a way as to make every two consecutive parts form a whole.

The structure of a individual renga would use the 5-7-5 part to set the challenge and the 7-7 part to be the response

This place that sits her
At the cusp of Geyer Road
And of vast Big Bend

Moves me to smiles and laughter...
Sometimes joy, sometimes madness.

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Haiku or Hokku comes from "haikai-nu-renga," a humorous linked poem form pioneered by the poet Basho.

The Four Great Masters of Haiku

MATSUO BASHO (1644-1694)-- Developed the "hokku" or "starting verse" for the generation of renga. Basho wrote hundreds of "hokku" which he presented as challenges for group participation.

YOSA BUSON (1716-1784)-- A leader in integrating art (especially Chinese art) and poetry. Buson takes Basho's already visual "hokku" and adds even more graphic, concrete elements.

KOBAYASHI ISSA (1762-1826)-- A "country bumpkin" who popularized the language of "hokku" and studied 'lower," less glamorous subjects. He added more subjectivity, melancholy and attention to minute detail.

yare utsu na	oh, don't swat!
hae ga te o suru	the fly rubs hands
ashi o suru	rubs feet

MASAOKA SHIKI (1867-1902)-- First to call "hokku" by "haiku" name. He completed the separation of haiku from the renga and tanka form, made it self-sufficient and sought to objectify the form, allowing the reader to bring meaning, not be told all by poet.

Summer-night insects
Falling burnt and dead...upon
My poem's paper.

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Guidelines For Haiku

Haiku should seek to:

1. Have a 5-7-5 structure

Take the round flat moon
Snap this twig for handle...
What a pretty fan!

-SOKAN-

2. Present an image, frequently of nature. (In traditional haiku this was often done indirectly --by using "season words" to call up a socially familiar time--e.g. the mention of "visiting the graves" refers to mid-summer.)

3. Refer to a particular event (which may also be on-going)

4. Be placed in the "Now".

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SEE

Black cloudbank broken
Scatters in the night...now see
Moon-lighted mountains!

-BASHO-

The turnip farmer rose
And with a fresh-pulled turnip...
Pointed to my road.

-ISSA-

While I turned my head
That traveler I'd just passed...
Melted into mist.

-SHIKI-

Shocking...the red of
Lacquered fingernails against
A white chrysanthemum.

-CHIYO-NI

Buddha on the hill...
From your holy nose indeed
Hangs an icicle.

-ISSA-

There in the water
Color of the water moves...
Translucent fishes.

-RAIZAN-

Nights are getting cold...
Not a single insect now
Attacks the candle.

-SHIKI-

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HEAR

In silent mid-night
Our old scarecrow topples down...
Weird hollow echo.

-BONCHO-

Lightning flash, crash...
Waiting in the bamboo grove
See three dew-drops fall.

-BUSON-

Butterfly asleep
Folded soft on temple bell..
Then bronze gong rang!

-BUSON-

Clear-colored stones
Are vibrating in the brook-bed...
Or the water is.

-SOSEKI-

Even the ocean
Rising and falling all day...
Sighing green like trees.

-BUSON-

A summer shower...
Along all the street, servants
Slapping shut shutters.

-SHIKI-

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TASTE

Under cherry-trees
Soup, the salad, fish and all...
Seasoned with petals

-BASHO-

Oh! I ate them all
And oh! What a stomach-ache...
Green stolen apples.

-SHIKI-

Fui! A sour plum...
Thin eyebrows pinched together
On the lovely face.

-BUSON-

Little orphan girl...
Eating a lovely dinner
In winter twilight.

-SHOHAKU-

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SMELL

Silent the old town...
The scent of flowers floating...
And evening bell.

-BASHO-

If there were fragrance
These heavy snow-flakes settling...
Lilies on the rocks.

-BASHO-

Lady butterfly
Perfumes her wings by floating
Over the orchid.

-BASHO-

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FEEL

For a lovely bowl
Let us arrange these flowers...
Since there is no rice.

-BASHO-

Dewdrop, let me cleanse
In your brief sweet waters...
These dark hands of life.

-BASHO-

Vendor of bright fans
Carrying his pack of breeze...
Suffocating heat!

-SHIKI-

But when I halted
On the windy street at twilight...
Snow struck against me.

-KITO-

Now having taken
Warmed water...the vase welcomes
My Camellia

-ONITSURA-

Coming from the bath
Cool on her breasts the warm breeze
Of the veranda.

-SHIKI-

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STORY STARTERS

My good father raged
When I snapped the peony...
Precious memory!

-TAIKO-

Too curious flower
Watching us pass, met death...
Our hungry donkey.

-BASHO-

Visiting the graves...
Trotting on to show the way...
Old family dog.

-ISSA-

Oh former renter
I know it all, all...down to
The very cold you felt.

-ISSA-

First dream of the year...
I kept it a dark secret...
Smiling to myself.

-SHO-U-

A childless housewife...
How tenderly she touches
Little dolls for sale.

-RANSETU-

My melons that you
Stole last year...this year I place
Upon your grave, my son.

-OEMARU-

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Mi ni shimu ya/ naki tsuma no kushi/ neya ni fumu

This piercing cold I feel
My dead wife's comb, in our bedroom
Under my heel....

-BUSON-

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STORY PROMPTS

Oh lucky beggar!...
Bright heaven and cool earth
Your summer outfit.

-KIKAKU-

Torches! Come and see
The burglar I have captured...
Oh! My eldest son!

-SOKAN-

In my new clothing
I feel so different I must
Look like someone else.

-BASHO-

Passing the doll shop
I picked up the littlest one...
Suddenly I smiled.

-BAISHITSU-

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IRONY AND TRUTH IN SMALL THINGS

For the emperor
Himself he will not lift his hat...
A stiff-backed scarecrow.

-DANSUI-

Live in simple faith...
Just as this trusting cherry
Flowers, fades, and falls.

-ISSA-

Dirty bath-water
Where can I pour you?...insects
Singing in the grass.

-ONITSURA-

Ah little warbler ...
Thanks-droppings on my porch
Because I love you?

-BASHO-

Congratulations
Issa...you have survived to feed
This year's mosquitoes.

-ISSA-

Glorious the moon...
Therefore our thanks dark clouds
Come to rest our necks.

-BASHO-

My little hut is burned
Now the roof keeps me no more
From the glorious moon.

-BASHO-

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Themes in Literature

A boy joins hunters
But sees the Bear they're hunting
Is greater than are they.

The old kingfisher
Not believing in water
Embraces his hunger.

Young men will all see
Greatness in any fathers
They'd wish for their own.

Her skin is radiant
Yet her heart and soul so dark
That she disappears.

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